

# The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE  
by  
Florence Becker Lennon

[Editor's Note: Mrs. Lennon, who last year published a biography of Lewis Carroll, Victoria through the Looking-Glass, and who several years ago published a sonnet sequence, Farewell to Walden, wrote the following article after a series of interviews with Wm. Sherburne Osgood of Colorado Springs, Colorado, the son of Ellen Sewall Osgood.]

If Ellen Sewall did fall in love with Thoreau, as Canby thinks perhaps she did, it was a youthful love that healed apparently without scars. In June, 1839, she met Joseph Osgood in her father's home in Scituate, and her first meeting with the Thoreaus took place the following month, when she and her mother came to visit her aunt Prudence Ward who was boarding with the Thoreaus in Concord.

The visit lasted three weeks. It was summer vacation, and John and Henry were free to take her berrying-- she was undoubtedly the maiden who sat in Henry's boat, but that was the following summer. Both boys were surely in love with her when they took the trip recorded in the Week, beginning August 31, 1839, though they may not have confided in each other till the next year. When they returned from the boat trip, John went to Scituate and spent two days walking the hills with Ellen.

The following June she was in Concord again, and again John followed her to Scituate. This time he proposed and was momentarily accepted. Ellen reconsidered and was sent on a visit to her Uncle Henry Sewall in Watertown. She was only eighteen, and first John and then Henry may have stirred her to the point of considering them. Both boys were very much in love, and she was the woman

(Continued on next page)

*Concord Oct 13<sup>th</sup>*  
*[1860] 1860*

*Dr. Samuel Knedland*

*Dear Sir,*

*The members  
of the Nat. Hist. Soc. may  
be interested to hear, that  
a female Canada Lynx  
(S. canadensis, or Bobcat  
(Cervix)) was killed, on the  
9<sup>th</sup> of September, in Carlisle,  
about three miles from  
the middle of Concord.  
I saw the carcass, I have  
the skin & skull, which  
I have set up. It is as  
large as any I've kind  
which I find described. I  
was at first troubled  
to identify it in the book,  
because it has naked  
soles, though the hind*

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## A GREAT DISCOVERY AT WALDEN POND

For years the Thoreau scholars have squabbled over the site of Thoreau's hut at Walden Pond. The world-famed cairn supposedly marked the spot. And so too did the four little granite posts set out a few feet in back of the cairn. Others claimed that neither marked the correct site. Now at last it has been settled for once and for all.

Roland Wells Robbins, a young Concordian with a zeal for things historical, spent a good part of last fall excavating around the shores of Thoreau's Cove and finally uncovered the foundations of the hut's chimney and fireplace last November 11th. Mr. Robbins promises to give a detailed report of his excavations and discoveries at a later date so we shall not try to tell his story here. Those who want a few further details may consult the CONCORD JOURNAL article listed in this issue's bibliography. Alton Hall Blackington gave a few more details on his "Yankee Yarns" broadcast over WBZ on February 1st. Those of us who have had the privilege of examining Mr. Robbins' reports are convinced beyond question of the accuracy of his discovery.

Plans are already well under way to construct a fitting memorial at the site to preserve the foundation for posterity just as Thoreau built it. Mr. Robbins plans in the near future to issue a detailed pamphlet, part of the profits from the sale of which will be devoted to a memorial fund. The New York Thoreau group is issuing a special edition of "Civil Disobedience" for 25¢ (deluxe edition \$2.00), profits from which will also be devoted to the fund. These may be purchased through Mr. Leonard Kleinfeld, 150 Nassau Street, New York.

Ever since the inception of our society, contributions have trickled into our treasury with the suggestion that they be devoted to some memorial to Thoreau. As treasurer of our society, I might add, I would welcome any further such contributions and at our annual meeting in July I would suggest that we allocate at least a portion of our fund to this memorial.

## ANNUAL MEETING

Now that the war is over and transportation difficulties have eased, it is to be hoped that we can resume our practice of holding an annual get-together of the members of the Thoreau Society. It is too early at this date to announce a program for this year's meeting. But I would suggest that members of the society now set aside the week-end of July 13th and 14th for a trip to Concord. Complete plans for the meeting will be sent out sometime late in June. The July bulletin will be postponed until the latter end of the month in order to give a complete report of the meeting.

## A NEW THOREAU LETTER

With the kind permission of the Boston Society of Natural History, we herewith reproduce a previously unpublished letter, written by Thoreau to their society. In an early issue we hope to tell further of Thoreau's interest in the society.



to perceive their quality even if she could not share either of their lives.

Canby thinks she yielded to what she supposed her father's wishes would be in refusing both these transcendental youths, but her own inclination could not have been too strong toward either. Her last surviving son, Mr. William Sherburne Osgood, of Colorado Springs, writes that when he was about ten years old, "I asked mother about the proposal from father, particularly what father said to grandpa Sewall, and mother told us that it was a Sunday and father was riding to Scituate, the next town south of Cohasset, to preach in grandpa's pulpit; they stopped and chatted for a few moments, and father handed grandpa Sewall a note asking for mother's hand in marriage, then both drove on. I asked mother what they would have done if grandpa had disapproved, and she said, 'we would probably have got married anyway.'"

This was a few days after October 26, 1842, when Mr. Osgood was ordained pastor of the First Congregational Church in Cohasset, where he remained over fifty years, celebrating his half-century at the church just before his wife's death. Ellen was twenty when she accepted him, then, and felt that she would have married him even without her father's approval. Something more than her father's wishes, and more than two years' added maturity, may have made the difference in her response. The nature of her life with Mr. Osgood, and of her reminiscences of the Thoreau boys, make it clear that she found her optimum fulfillment in the parsonage at Scituate.

Her son says again, "Father and mother were very happy together; I have never heard either one criticize or complain, and they did everything possible to make us children happy, and no children could have loved and respected their parents more than we did ours." In fact Mr. Osgood re-

marked in a personal interview that he thought families today had no idea of what love really was, and cited the time when his mother was away and the children gathered around her clothes closet to bury their faces in the dresses she had left behind. There was gaiety and humor in the home too. Mrs. Osgood liked to read to the children from the Bab Ballads, and their father took them on nature walks.

In a little pamphlet Joseph. A. Fifty Years' Pastorate. Boston: A. T. Bliss & Co., 1893/ printed to celebrate his fifty years' pastorate, Mr. Joseph Osgood included a memoir of his wife, who had died shortly after the celebration and before the printing of the pamphlet, in the fall of 1892. He said, "For more than fifty years we have lived for one another and have had the same interests, and the same joys and sorrows."

"The characteristics of Mrs. Osgood were a deep and tender love, unselfishness, devotion to the needs and happiness of others, perfect truthfulness and sincerity, and a conscientious regard to duty. She detested all falsehood, meanness, and wrong. She always desired to sacrifice her own comfort and pleasure to the comforts and pleasures of my children and myself."

"She was a great help to me in my ministerial work, being a very candid and just critic; and while she called me strictly to account for what she felt to be objectionable in expression or doctrine, she praised what seemed to her good and useful."

"Some persons in the parish and some of her personal friends may have felt that she should have visited more, and have been more attentive to some parish duties, but when they consider that, owing to our large family [they had ten children, all of whom survived their parents/ and straitened circumstances, her life was, day after day, and year after year, a life of constant care and toil; that her housework, begun at early morn, often continued throughout the whole day, and sometimes till ten o'clock at night, and that when she found a few hours of leisure, she needed them for rest, they will not be disposed to blame her severely. These hours of rest, when free from her daily labors, she devoted chiefly to writing and reading."

"She was a diligent correspondent with her friends and with our absent children."

"She was a constant reader of the best English and French literature, and made herself familiar with the most noted new books as they appeared."

"Notwithstanding her cares, her labors, and her sorrows, for she had her sorrows, I believe her life was a life of great blessedness. I think her last year was her happiest-- full of positive satisfaction and pleasure. She rejoiced especially in the celebration of our fiftieth anniversary, and any honor conferred on me, and the prosperity of our children, gave her great delight. . . I cannot be too thankful for the blessing her life has been to me and for the sweetness of the remembrance of her left behind to me and to our children and to all who knew and loved her."

John and Henry knew how to choose a woman, if they did not know how to win her. Mr. William Osgood remembers chiefly Sophia Thoreau in the sitting room in the Cohasset house and his mother's merry references to Henry's shiftlessness and impracticality. In the summer of 1851, Canby says, Henry saw Ellen at Cohasset, though there is nothing in the Journals or in Cape Cod to show it. As a literary man, who must have guessed his journals would some day be of interest to strangers, and as a transcendental introvert, Henry deliberately suppressed or distorted all too personal references from his journals.

Though Canby feels that the lost turtle dove of the famous passage in Walden was a transcendental entity and not Ellen at all, it seems quite possible that it was both. Valuing leisure and the opportunity to ripen artistically and spiritually at his own pace, with no outside pressure and commitments, Henry could never have provided Ellen with the dove-cote she required.

*it to be the Canadensis.  
Audubon & Bachman give  
"soles hairy" as one of the  
specific characters of this  
species, and "soles naked"  
as a specific character of  
S. Rufus. Emmons (in  
the Massachusetts Report)  
says further & more par-  
ticularly, "The two most  
remarkable characters  
of the Lynx [i.e. Canadensis]  
are the beautiful pencils  
of black hair which orna-  
ment the ears, and the  
perfect hairiness of the legs  
of the feet, which have no  
naked spots or tubercles  
like the other species of the  
feline race:" and, speaking  
of the Bay Lynx, he says  
that it "is easily distinguished  
from the Canadensis by*



Longstreth, T. Morris. TWO RIVERS MEET IN CONCORD  
Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946. 286pp. \$2.50

Concord, Massachusetts has become a favored scene for novelists of late. In the recent surge of historical fiction, America's most famous small town has received its duly prominent place. Strangely enough though, Thoreau has rarely figured to any length in these creations. He has occasionally passed on and off the stage. Mr. Longstreth, who was secretary pro-tem of our society during my war-time leave, has set out to fill that gap.

TWO RIVERS MEET IN CONCORD is a "love-story of Concord of the mid-1840's." It is light, hammock fiction, a pleasant summer's tale spun around a rather artificial plot involving the flutterings of young love and the adventures of the Underground Railroaders. But to the students of Thoreau, it will have a particular interest for here is his longest fiction portrait yet to appear. The years of the novel were eventful ones and they have been well-recorded by Mr. Longstreth. We meet Thoreau ringing the Town Hall bell for Emerson's lecture on slavery, working in the Underground Railroad, building his Walden hut, lecturing on blueberries, and spending his night in Concord jail. Mr. Longstreth has read his Thoreau well and presents an accurate and lively portrait.

Several years ago the author posed the question in a brief article in the MONITOR, Was Thoreau cold? It is a problem which has plagued most of us who have attempted to gain some insight into his mind. Says Mr. Longstreth, "His idea of friendship, well, it's love with the flesh left out. . . If Henry Thoreau could wear a stone wall around him, he'd do it. . . He talks about finding out life, and then avoids marriage, as if a good half of life wasn't woman."

Why is this? Why could Elizabeth Hoar say she could love Henry but not like him? Mr. Longstreth has found part of the answer when he says, "What Concord called Thoreau's coldness was in reality his extreme attention to the job at hand. He could spend hours tracing a birdcall, but had no minute for the street corner." He has found even more when he concludes that although Thoreau never lost himself in love, "He's never been unhappy. Greatness is not bought for nothing."

It is time for a thorough-going study of Thoreau's personality in an attempt to find what brought his genius forth. Even though he has used the technique of fiction, Mr. Longstreth has laid a good foundation for this study. We hope that it may encourage others to delve deeper.

THE WORK OF FANNIE HARDY ECKSTORM

There is no better authority on Thoreau's Maine Woods ventures than Mrs. Fannie Hardy Eckstorm of Brewer, Maine. I hope that someday some astute publisher will issue Thoreau's Maine volume with Mrs. Eckstorm's article on it, now buried in the musty files of the ATLANTIC MONTHLY of thirty years ago, as its preface. Still better would it be if she were persuaded to annotate the book throughout, for hers would unquestionably be the definitive edition.

From time to time Mrs. Eckstorm has issued other studies that, while not pointed directly at Thoreau, have served to give us a better understanding of his Maine adventures. THE PENOBSCOT MAN, for example, contains several chapters on his Indian guides. A few months ago she brought forth still another volume, OLD JOHN NEPTUNE AND OTHER MAINE INDIAN SHAMANS, which focuses even more light on the journeys to Maine.

OLD JOHN NEPTUNE is ostensibly a study of the fact and fiction gathered around that legendary old Indian governor whom Thoreau visited at his island home in the Penobscot River. I am neither an ethnologist nor an anthropologist so I can hardly give a critical analysis of her scholarship, but to my unlearned eye the amount of research which her study must have required seems overwhelming. The casual reader will find a chapter or two too pedantic to hold his interest, but Mrs. Eckstorm has very thoughtfully labeled these as digressions

for the scholar only. In the remainder of the book though, he will find an absorbing account of how a "lowly Indian" created a legend around himself for his own purposes.

Thoreau enters the scene when his account of his interview with Neptune furnishes Mrs. Eckstorm with some of her most valuable clues in her scholarly detective work. Even more enlightening to the Thoreau student however is her picture of Joe Polis the Indian guide who was one of Thoreau's major heroes. She has succeeded where Thoreau himself failed in portraying Polis at his proper stature. We can now understand Thoreau's hero-worship.

In these days of war-time books it is a pleasure to add a word of commendation for the typography and make-up of the book. It is a book-collector's gem. It has been issued in a strictly limited edition and is now available only from the author at 173 Wilson Street, Brewer, Maine. Price \$5.50, postpaid. While you are ordering OLD JOHN NEPTUNE you may also care to add \$2.50 and obtain a copy of THE PENOBSCOT MAN, briefly mentioned above.

The Liberty ship, Henry D. Thoreau, its whereabouts unreportable during the war, suddenly turned up in the news in the last week of December when its bomb cargo declared its own civil disobedience and threatened to sink the ship. Fortunately it made port safely.

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*The shorter pencils of hair upon the ear, and by the nakedness of the balls of the toes. This last character, it appears to me, is sufficiently important in the borealis [i.e. Canadian] to constitute it a genus by itself."*

*At length, I obtained a copy of Baird's "Mammals," but still I was not satisfied with I had read to near the end of his account, when he says that he has received a second specimen, "in summer pelage," and that "the pads of the feet in this specimen are distinctly visible, not being at all overgrown, as in winter specimens." This is my animal, both in this*



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*and in other respects  
I am this minute  
because it is not right  
made quite distinct enough,  
that hairy roles are  
no more characteristic  
of this Lynx than naked  
roles are.*

*Judging from the above  
descriptions the only possibility  
in any specimen is a distinct  
black line commencing at  
the eye and terminating  
in the black portion of  
the ruff.*

*I suspect that some  
of the Lynxes killed in  
this vicinity of late years,  
and called the Bay Lynx,  
were the Canada Lynx.*

*Yrs. truly,  
Henry D. Thoreau*

The Thoreau Society is an informal organization of friends and followers of Henry David Thoreau, scattered across the country and abroad. Membership is open to all interested. Fees are one dollar a year. This bulletin is issued occasionally, usually quarterly, by the secretary:

Walter Harding  
54 Prospect Street  
Bridgewater, Mass.

Other officers of the society are Dr. Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; and Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president.